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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 ADDIS ABABA 001558

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SUBJECT: ETHIOPIA: MELES TELLS ADMIRAL FALLON "TIDE HAS
TURNED" IN SOMALIA

REF: ADDIS ABABA 1534 (NOTAL)

Classified By: POL/ECON COUNSELOR KEVIN K. SULLIVAN. REASON: 1.4 (b) a
nd (d).

11. (C) SUMMARY. PM Meles told visiting CENTCOM Commander Admiral William J. Fallon on May 11 that after a "second round" of fighting in Somalia in mid-April, the "tide had turned" against "jihadist insurgents" and in favor of the Transitional Federal Government (TFG). Meles acknowledged that the GOE had been overly optimistic initially about the commitment to peace of some Hawiye sub-clans. He argued that those same sub-clans had miscalculated the military situation, expecting that a rapid Ethiopian pull-out would allow them to intimidate African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) peacekeepers. Following the successful Ethiopian-led effort to drive insurgents from Mogadishu, however, all clan leaders, according to Meles, now recognize that backing the insurgency will not get them what they want. To bolster his contention, Meles said that civilians in the Somali capital have begun to point out mines and arms caches to Ethiopian National Defense Force (ENDF) and AMISOM troops. Furthermore, formerly reluctant clan leaders have now asked that some 700-800 of their militia be integrated into the national police and armed forces. Insurgents, meanwhile have retreated to the marshy area around Ras Komboni and to remote areas in north central Somalia, where they can do less damage. Meles hoped that Ethiopia could withdraw most of its troops from Somalia following the upcoming national reconciliation conference, but said he would keep the ENDF vigilant from just across the border. The Prime Minister thanked Admiral Fallon for the "first-rate" intelligence shared with the ENDF during both phases of the battle in Somalia and asked that such cooperation continue, along with more military assistance for capacity building and equipment. He expressed stark pessimism about prospects for improving relations with Eritrea, but firmly downplayed any Ethiopian intention to initiate a full-scale war. Meles also urged that the USG not hastily abandon Iraq; he expressed concern about the consequences for Ethiopia of further instability in the Gulf, as well as a potential "explosion" in Sudan in the coming years. END SUMMARY.

12. (SBU) CENTCOM Commander, Admiral William J. Fallon;
CJTF-HOA Commander Rear Admiral James Hart; and Ambassador

Yamamoto called on Prime Minister Meles May 11. CENTCOM staff members, DATT and Pol/Econ Counselor (note-taker) also participated in the meeting, along with the Prime Minister's Advisor Gebretensai Gebremichael.

MISCALCULATIONS FORCE SECOND ROUND OF FIGHTING IN SOMALIA

13. (C) After welcoming Admiral Fallon, the Prime Minister briefed him on the situation in Somalia. He claimed that the ENDF's recent offensive in Mogadishu drove most insurgents from the capital to shelters in remote areas in the southwest of the country, near their traditional base in the marshes of Ras Komboni, and in north central Somalia, near the Ethiopian border. While terrorist cells still existed, he claimed that the insurgency's military structure had been broken. This successful "second round" in the Somalia conflict had now created an opportunity to consolidate peace.

14. (C) The second round had been necessary, Meles said, because some Hawiye sub-clan leaders had made a military miscalculation. They believed that since the Ethiopian military was planning to pull out, the insurgents would be able to intimidate African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) peacekeepers and increase their power. They also assumed that they would have a significant advantage fighting in the urban setting of Mogadishu. The GOE had, for its part, miscalculated the level of commitment among these leaders to peaceful negotiations with the TFG. In fact, sub-clans who had accumulated property in and around Mogadishu in the last ten years remained concerned that they would lose it under TFG rule, and had instead focused on weakening the TFG,

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rather than cooperating.

HAWIYE CLAN LEADERS NOW SEE NO ALTERNATIVE TO TALKS

15. (C) Following the military defeat of the insurgency in the capital, leaders of the Hawiye had seen that their property had suffered significant damage in the fighting, that there was significant risk they would lose control of it, and that their militia had suffered heavy losses. "The sub-clans riding the jihadist horse are now convinced that it won't take them where they want to go," Meles said. The Prime Minister told Admiral Fallon that there were several clear signs that Hawiye sub-clans had discarded their alliance with extremist insurgents. One was that they had requested that 700-800 of their remaining militia be integrated into the national police and armed forces. Another was that civilians in the city were now pointing out arms caches to ENDF and AMISOM patrols; only one landmine had exploded in recent days, while 17 had been located and disarmed. Meles also referred to positive meetings between the Hawiye elders and the TFG in recent days, in which the former had received assurances that there would be no restitution of "their" property to the original owners, and that they would be allowed to participate fully in the government along with other clans. While the prime minister acknowledged that there was much left to do, he stated confidently that "the tide is turning" away from the insurgency and toward the TFG.

ENDF TO PULL OUT AFTER NRC, BUT STAY NEAR

16. (C) Admiral Fallon asked whether the TFG could provide the strong leadership needed to stabilize Somalia. Meles paused, then admitted that Somalia was so fractured that any government would be forced to "make compromises every day" in order to survive. There was as yet no social basis for a truly strong government; nonetheless, the TFG could

provide improved stability and security and a reduction in violence.

17. (C) Meles also told Admiral Fallon that he hoped to withdraw most ENDF troops following the National Reconciliation Conference (NRC). The GOE would continue to assist in building the capacity of TFG military forces, and would also try to counter the threat of insurgent activities in north central Somalia from its own side of the border. The Prime Minister noted that Mogadishu was only 100 kilometers from the Ethiopian border, making it possible for the ENDF to remain a military factor in Somalia even while based in Ethiopian territory, particularly if AMISOM could be "beefed up." Admiral Fallon remarked that the PM was the first person to express any real confidence to him about prospects for peace and stability in Somalia.

PESSIMISM ON ERITREA, BUT WAR UNLIKELY

18. (C) When asked about Eritrea, Meles replied that President Isaias remained bent on undermining Ethiopia by 1) unraveling the Sanaa Forum for regional cooperation; and 2) supporting both external and internal enemies of the GOE, including the Somali insurgency and domestic rebel groups like the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) and the Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF). The PM observed that Eritrea was often a conduit for support coming from outside the Horn of Africa; a number of other countries were involved, he said. The Eritrean Government was confident that Ethiopia would not respond militarily to the provocations that it was conducting, and so it could comfortably continue this campaign. While Ethiopia would have the upper hand in full-scale war, the GOE had no desire to pursue this avenue. Eritrea, for its part, did not have the means to wage war on Ethiopia, Meles asserted.

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19. (C) Meles expressed pessimism about prospects for mediation between the two countries, arguing that the leadership in Asmara had based its legitimacy on confrontation with Ethiopia. Furthermore, a number of senior officials had been imprisoned for treason for allegedly advocating negotiations with Ethiopia. Although he had nurtured some hope for political reconciliation with Eritrea until "quite recently," Meles said he had now concluded that political conditions were not right for political dialogue between the two countries.

MELES PRAISES COOPERATION, ASKS FOR MORE

110. (u) The Prime Minister praised the support and cooperation the GOE had been receiving from the USG in fields such as Parliamentary and judicial reform and police training. We need more of the same, he said. Such cooperation would help Ethiopia make progress on its top priorities: alleviating poverty and achieving the UN Millennium Development Goals.

111. (C) When Admiral Fallon asked about what help CJTF-HOA could provide, the Prime Minister expressed his appreciation for the intelligence-sharing HOA had provided during both phases of the military campaign in Somalia. The ENDF could not have accomplished its objectives in Somalia without this assistance, he added. Meles urged that whatever changes were implemented under the new structure of an U.S. Africa Command, he hoped that "these benefits" would not be lost. Admiral Fallon mentioned that he had earlier agreed with ENDF Chief of General Staff (CHOD) Lieutenant General Samora Yonus to undertake a complete review of U.S. military training and capacity-building programs for the ENDF. The PM welcomed the review and expressed particular interest in USG help with

ENDF "institutional arrangements and organization."

FUTURE THREATS FROM SUDAN AND GULF

¶12. (C) PM Meles expressed concern about two other security threats facing Ethiopia. One came from the potential unraveling of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) between north and south Sudan, which he said could lead to an "explosion." The other threat stemmed from the evolution of the situation in the Persian Gulf, where the tide might turn in favor of fundamentalism and against Ethiopia. Meles said that he had been following the debate in Washington concerning the future of U.S. involvement in Iraq; he hoped that domestic U.S. sentiment would not lead to a total abandonment of the "struggle in the Gulf."

¶13. (C) Admiral Fallon said the level of sectarian killings had declined measurably and security in substantial areas of both Baghdad and Anbar Province had improved since the "surge" of U.S. military personnel in Iraq. Local leaders in Anbar and some areas of Baghdad were now turning against Al Qaeda operatives. Suicide bombings remained one of the greatest security challenges, Admiral Fallon concluded.

¶14. (C) At the end of this portion of the meeting with PM Meles, Admiral Fallon and the Ambassador remained behind to discuss a sensitive bilateral issue (reftel).

¶15. (U) Admiral William J. Fallon has reviewed this message.
YAMAMOTO